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THE ORIGINAL ONLINE AUDIO MAGAZINE

**If you're like me, you discover new music through a variety of sources. However, despite the increasing popularity of outlets such as Spotify, Pandora, and YouTube, my main source for new music remains the radio -- FM broadcasts listened to in the car or at home, Internet streams at home and at work -- and I suspect that's still true for most people. While FM remains limited by the tuner's proximity to the station, the beauty of Internet streaming is that you can tune into distant stations from all over the world, and also listen to Internet-only broadcasts. While the bit rates (as low as 32kbps) of most stations leave much to be desired, higher-quality streams up to 384kbps are available, and the sound can be reasonably good. More important, Internet Radio exposes you to all sorts of formats and genres.**

Although I'd originally purchased my Logitech Transporter in late 2008 as a streaming network music player and DAC ($1999 USD, when last available), I'd largely relegated it to Internet Radio streaming, and continued to use my Wadia 830 CD player as my primary music source for the next two years, due to my preference for the Wadia's sound. Although the Transporter did later supplant the Wadia, it has since been superseded by my Meitner MA-1 DAC; the Transporter's primary function is once again that of a tuner. But while the Logitech may no longer be my top-dog digital source, I still love it for its ease of use.

Before buying the Transporter, I'd entertained the idea of getting an FM tuner from Magnum Dynalab, but until I moved to Southern California, I'd never been around enough decent radio stations to justify the expense -- and when I bought the Transporter, I was primarily interested in using it as a music server. But a few months after that purchase, Magnum Dynalab released their MD 109 World Source Platform: an FM tuner that can stream satellite radio and Internet feeds, and has optional digital inputs that allow it to serve as a DAC. Talk about buyer's remorse!

Regardless, I continued to enjoy my Transporter. But given the excellent reputation of Magnum Dynalab's tubed integrated amplifiers and tuners, I frequently checked their website to see what was new. In 2012 I noticed that Magnum Dynalab was offering a new series of four models of Internet Radio tuner, with various mixes of functions and features, and immediately requested for review the MD 806T, the model just above the entry-level MD 801. At $2695, the MD 806T cost only $700 more than I paid for my Transporter. Unlike the MD 109 World Source Platform, the MD 806T is limited to FM, Digital Audio Broadcasting (where available), Internet Radio, but can also function as a music player with an outboard USB or NAS hard drive. The 806T doesn't receive satellite radio, but given the increasing homogeneity of SiriusXM Radio since the merger of Sirius and XM, I don't find that absence a negative. Also unlike the MD 109, the MD 806T doesn't include a DAC as standard equipment, though that's available as an option. Most relevant to me was the MD 806T's reception of Internet streaming, which makes accessible over 20,000 stations worldwide.

## Design

The MD 806T measures 17.5"W x 4.5"H x 11"D and weighs only 11 pounds, but its 3/8"-thick faceplate and solid-steel chassis make it feel quite substantial. The rather plain front panel is dominated by a central, 3.5" color touchscreen, which displays the menus, station ID, and bit rate. To the left side of this is a power pushbutton, to the right an input for a USB flash drive or hard drive.

In the top panel, slot vents front and rear permit the dissipation of heat.

The MD 806T's output stage shares the same circuit topology found in the discontinued MD 100T FM tuner. The centerpieces of this design are two of Magnum Dynalab's reference 6922 vacuum tubes, which have long been responsible for the classic Magnum Dynalab sound. The MD 806T also features Wima capacitors, gold-plated tube sockets, and Kimber Kable's Hyperpure wiring throughout. The frequency response is specified as 15Hz-200kHz, +/-1dB, the balanced audio output as 2.2V; the line audio output is 1V.

## Magnum Dynalab rear

The rear panel has, from left to right, an IEC outlet for a detachable power cord, a TosLink digital output, an Ethernet input, a coaxial digital output, an FM antenna input, and balanced and single-ended analog outputs. At the center of the rear panel is space for the digital input of the optional DAC. The remote control is the same plastic unit that Magnum Dynalab provides with all its models, and is the same size as most TV/home-theater remotes.

The warranties are only two years for parts and labor on the MD 806T, two months for the 6922 tubes. The latter may be standard for tubes; the former seems a bit short.

## Setup and interface

Unlike my Transporter, which I had up and running within minutes with minimal reference to the owner's manual, setting up the MD 806T required careful reading of the manual to ensure proper operation.

The MD 806T can be directly connected via Ethernet to a home network, or wirelessly via Wi-Fi. When I first plugged in and turned on the MD 806T, it didn't recognize or connect to my Wi-Fi network. I shot an e-mail to Magnum Dynalab, who told me that if the Wi-Fi router is not in the same room or is too far away from the MD 806T, then it may not pick up the signal right away. They suggested that I unplug the MD 806T, move it into the room with the router, and plug it in there. When the network connection is established, I should then return the MD 806T to the listening room and go through the initial setup again.

While the MD 806T did connect to my home network when in the same room as the router, and its display continued to report the connection as active after I'd returned it to the listening room, I still couldn't stream music. Magnum Dynalab then recommended that I remove the top plate. Oddly enough, this worked, and had the additional benefit of letting me see the interior and the glowing tubes during daily use. After that, I had no further problems. However, I always made sure to replace the top plate on the days my housekeeper was due to arrive.

I returned to the owner's manual to continue with setup and was referred to an Internet Radio portal, www.wifiradiofrontier.com, for which I registered with an access code provided by Magnum Dynalab. I was then able to search for radio stations by location and genre, select stations for listening, and create a favorites list. Once I'd completed this, it was automatically paired with the MD 806T, with no further effort on my part.

All of the MD 806T's functions can be controlled with the touchscreen or the remote control. So far, no Apple remote app has been made available. Although I prefer the Logitech Transporter's user interface, once set up, the MD 806T was easy to use and problem-free.

I connected the MD 806T's balanced output to an input of my Jeff Rowland Design Group Concentra integrated amp so I could toggle between the MD 806T and the Transporter, listening for differences.

## Sound

I listened to several musical genres, but my critical listening was primarily with classical music and jazz. Throughout the review period,

the MD 806T performed flawlessly; I never experienced any interruptions in the streaming, something my Transporter is occasionally prone to.

A favorite station of mine is ad-free ABC Jazz, from Australia (www.abcjazz.net.au). Unlike most US jazz stations (which are mostly public or SiriusXM), ABC doesn't cater to those purists who feel that the only jazz worth hearing is by the "jazz masters" of the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, and that playlists should consist only of interpretations of standards. ABC plays a wide variety of classic and modern jazz and features many current artists, not just Aussie acts. ABC also features a higher bit rate, 128kbps, than many Internet Radio streams, and consequently sounds better.

ABC Jazz sounded full and rich through the MD 806T, with a natural, engaging immediacy. When I listened casually, nothing in the sound led me to believe that I was hearing a compressed audiostream, as opposed to a CD. Only with focused listening did I pick up on the cues that indicate a compressed stream: a foreshortened soundstage and less-than-crystalline treble reproduction. With any compressed music, be it MP3 or Internet Radio streams, I've noticed that it's the highs that suffer most. Cymbals don't typically have that clear metallic ring, and strings sound undifferentiated. This was far less a problem with the MD 806T than with the Logitech Transporter; the sound had more body and density through the Magnum Dynalab.

The sound was just as satisfying with classical music from locally based KUSC (www.kusc.org) and from Australia's ABC Classic (www.abc.net.au/classic). Low-level details were not obscured, and the music had a vibrancy that was an absolute pleasure to hear. The MD 806T had a much warmer tone than the Transporter, but not in a syrupy or gauzy manner. Instead, what I noticed was that the music's tonality, color, and texture were more palpably realistic than through the Transporter. Most notably, acoustic and electric basses sounded more tactile. Reverb was more noticeable, and the sense of space between instruments and on the soundstage was more apparent. The MD 806T's sound was more three-dimensional, particularly in terms of soundstage depth.

I'm not an electrical engineer, but my feeling that the sonic improvements over the Transporter wrought by the MD 806T were due to the latter's use of 6922 tubes, in addition to Magnum Dynalab's own proprietary circuitry.

## Conclusions

I enjoyed my time with the Magnum Dynalab MD 806T and feel that it offers good performance for the price; and for Internet Radio, much better sound -- wholly listenable and engaging -- than my Logitech Transporter. If you're in the market for a new tuner, you should consider Internet Radio streaming for all the possibilities it brings. The MD 806T seemed to optimize that experience, and therefore deserves your consideration.

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**Associated Equipment**

Loudspeakers -- Revel Salon2, Audioengine A2
Integrated amplifier -- Jeff Rowland Design Group Concentra
Digital sources -- Meitner Audio MA-1 DAC; Apple Mac Mini running OSX 10.7.4, iTunes 10.6.1, Amarra 2.4, remote-controlled using screen sharing via iMac OS 10.7.4, Logitech Transporter Music Server, Devilsound USB DAC
Interconnects -- Cardas Audio Neutral Reference, Halide Design S/PDIF asynchronous USB Bridge with BNC termination
Speaker cables -- Cardas Audio Neutral Reference
Headphone system -- Sennheiser HD 600 headphones with Cardas headphone cable upgrade, Ultimate Ears UE 11 Pro, Ray Samuels Audio Emmeline The Predator headphone amplifier
Accessories -- Audio Power Industries Power Pack II power conditioner; Cardas Twinlink and Cardas Cross power cords; Cardas Audio Signature XLR, RCA, and BNC caps; Cardas/Ayre Acoustics Irrational, But Efficacious! system-enhancement disc
Magnum Dynalab MD 806T Internet Radio Tuner
Price: $2695 USD.
Warranty: Two years parts and labor; two months, tubes.

Website:www.magnumdynalab.com